

## Pañca Sekha,balā Sutta

### The Discourse on the Learner's Five Powers

[Qualities leading to arhathood]

(Aṅguttara Nikāya 5.2/3:2)

Translated by Piya Tan ©2005

#### 1 Introduction

The Pañca Sekha,balā Sutta, as the title declares, deals with the five powers of the trainer, that is, a saint short of the arhat-become (who is called “adept,” *asekha*, literally “non-learner”). These five powers apparently are the more advanced version (for those on the path to awakening) of the five factors of exertion [striving] (*padhāni-y-aṅga*), a popular set for the lay person, found in **the Kaṇṇaka-ṭṭhala Sutta** (M 90),<sup>1</sup> **the Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33)<sup>2</sup> and **the Padhāniyaṅga Sutta**,<sup>3</sup> and also in a number of other suttas. The five factors of exertion [striving] are given in the Kaṇṇaka-ṭṭhala Sutta as follows:

“Maharajah, there are these five factors of exertion [striving]<sup>4</sup> [for the destruction of mental cankers].<sup>5</sup> What are the five?

(1) Here a monk has **faith**;<sup>6</sup> he has faith in the Tathāgata's awakening thus,

‘Such is he, the Blessed One, an arhat, the fully self-awakened one, accomplished in wisdom and conduct, well-farer, knower of worlds, peerless guide of tamable persons, teacher of gods and humans, awakened, blessed.’

(2) He is **free from illness and affliction**, possessing a good digestion that is neither too cool nor too warm but medium, and able to bear the strain of exertion.

(3) He is **honest and sincere**,<sup>7</sup> and shows himself as he really is to teachers, the wise and companions in the holy life.

<sup>1</sup> M 90/2:125-133.

<sup>2</sup> D 33.2.1(16)/3:237.

<sup>3</sup> A 5.53/3:65.

<sup>4</sup> The 5 factors of exertion (*padhāni-y-aṅga*): as at **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.2.1(16)/3:237), **Bodhi Rāja,kumāra S** (M 85.58/2:95), **Padhāniyaṅga S** (A 5.53/3:65), **Paṭṭhāna S** (A 5.135/3:152-154), and **Senāsana S** (A 10.11/5:15). See Introd (1) above.

<sup>5</sup> “Mental cankers,” *āsava*, lit “cankers,” fr *ā-savati* “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously tr as taints (“deadly taints”, RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists four *āsava*: the canker of (1) sense-desire (*kāma-āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhava-āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh-āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāśava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These four are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of three cankers (omitting the canker of views) [43] is probably older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: *āsava*.

<sup>6</sup> Comys here mention 4 kinds of faith:

(1) faith through attainment (*āgamaniya,saddhā*, other Comys: *āgamana,saddhā*), that is, the faith of the “omni-scient” Bodhisattva [one bound to become a fully self-awakened one] by mastering it since his firm resolve (to become Buddha) (*sabbaññū,bodhisattānaṃ saddhā abhinīhārato paṭṭhāya āgatattā*);

(2) faith through realization [understanding] (*adhigama,saddhā*), that is, the attainment of the noble saints through realization [understanding] (*ariya,sāvakanāṃ paṭivedhena adhiḡatattā*);

(3) faith by conviction (*okappana,saddhā*), that is, conviction by way of unshakability [unshakable faith] when it is said [when he hears the words], “Buddha, Dharma, Saṅgha” (*Buddho dhammo saṅgho ti vutte acala,bhāvena okappanāṃ*);

(4) faith of calm joy [“confidence of trust” (Gethin 2001:115 n51)] (*pasāda,saddhā*), that is, the arising of calm and joyful faith (*pasād’uppatti*). (DA 2:529; MA 3:325 f = AA 3:257)

See **Pubba,koṭṭhaka S** (S 48.44/5:220-222) = SD 10.7 Introd (1) (2005).

<sup>7</sup> *Aṣaṭho amāyāvī*, “not fraudulent, no deceitful” (A 3:65, 153; S 4:298; cf 299).

(4) He dwells **energetic** in abandoning unwholesome states, in promoting wholesome states, steadfast, resolute in his effort and not shirking from the task of cultivating wholesome states.<sup>8</sup>

(5) He is **wise**: he possesses wisdom regarding the arising and falling away (of things) that is noble and penetrative, and that leads to the complete destruction of suffering.

These are the five factors of exertion.

**10c** There are these four castes, maharajah—the nobles, the brahmins, the merchants, and the workers. Now if they possessed these five factors of exertion, it would be for their welfare and happiness for a long time.” (M 90.10/2:128)

Of the learner's five powers, that of wisdom is the most important, of which **the (Kūṭa) Sekha, balā Sutta** (A 5.12) declares, “Of these five powers of the learner, this is the foremost; this is what holds them together, namely, the power of wisdom.”<sup>9</sup> This power is the wisdom regarding the arising and falling away of things.

In **the Bodhi Rāja, kumāra Sutta** (M 85), the Buddha tells the prince that if anyone had only one of the five factors, he could train under the Buddha.<sup>10</sup> **The Patthāna Sutta** (A 5.125) says just as a crown prince (with five noble qualities: well-born; handsome; beloved of his parents; beloved by the people; skilled in the way of the warrior) can aspire to kingship, even so a monk with the five factors can aspire to liberation (A 5.135/3:152-154). **The Senāsana Sutta** (A 10.11) says that a monk with the five factors living in a suitable lodging complete in five factors—suitably located away from a village; secluded; free from pests and bad weather; basic necessities available without difficulty; accessible learned elders dwell there—will attain liberation there (A 10.11/5:15).

## 2 Comparison of factors

Besides the two lists mentioned here, there is the better known set of five powers (*pañca, bala*) of the saints (*ariya*). Here is a comparative table of the three sets of factors:

<u>(A) The factors of striving</u>	<u>(B) The learner's powers</u>	<u>(C) The saint's powers</u>
1. faith ( <i>saddhā</i> )	1. faith ( <i>saddhā</i> )	1. faith ( <i>saddhā</i> )
2. health ( <i>app'ābādho appātāṅko</i> )	2. moral shame ( <i>hiri</i> )	2. effort ( <i>virīya</i> )
3. honesty & sincerity ( <i>asaṭho</i> )	3. moral fear ( <i>ottappa</i> )	3. mindfulness ( <i>sati</i> )
4. energy ( <i>āradḍha, viriyo</i> )	4. effort ( <i>virīya</i> )	4. concentration ( <i>samādhi</i> )
5. wisdom ( <i>paññā</i> )	5. wisdom ( <i>paññā</i> )	5. wisdom ( <i>paññā</i> )

For the most part, except for (2-3), **lists A and B** concur. While in the factors of striving (A), the second factor, “health,” has to do with the body (ie physical conduct), and the third, “honesty and sincerity,” has to do with both physical action and speech, the parallel learner's powers—moral shame and moral fear—have to do with physical and verbal actions, but also with mental deeds (intention and mindfulness). The overall difference is in the level of training, the former of the lay practitioner, the latter of the saints (that entails a higher mental training).

**List C**, however, comprises specifically with the saint's powers, that is, the spiritual faculties stabilized into the spiritual powers of all the saints (including the arhats). While the learner's powers, however, is more comprehensive, as they include the meditative factors, too. However, unlike the learner, the arhat's mindfulness (C3) and concentration (C4) are fully developed.

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<sup>8</sup> *Āradḍha, viriyo viharati akusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ pahānāya kusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ upasampadāya thāmaṃvā daḷha, parakkamo anikkhitta, dhuro kusalesu dhammesu.*

<sup>9</sup> *Etāṃ aggaṃ eta saṅgāhikāṃ etaṃ saṅghātaniyaṃ yad idaṃ pañña, balaṃ, A 5.12/3:10.*

<sup>10</sup> M 85.58/2:95.

## The Discourse on the Learner's Five Powers

(A 5.2/3:2)

[2]

1 Monks, there are these five powers of the learner. What are the five?

The power of faith.

The power of moral shame.

The power of moral fear.

The power of effort.

The power of wisdom.

(1) And what, monks, is the power of faith?

2 Here, monks, a noble disciple has faith. He has faith in the Tathagata's awakening, thus: "Such is he, the Blessed One, an arhat, the fully self-awakened one, accomplished in wisdom and conduct, well-farer, knower of worlds, peerless guide of tamable persons, teacher of gods and humans, awakened, blessed."

This, monks, is called the power of faith.

(2) And what, monks, is the power of moral shame?

3 Here, monks, a noble disciple has moral shame. He is morally ashamed of bodily deeds, verbal deeds, mental deeds; he is morally ashamed regarding the attainment of evil unwholesome states.<sup>11</sup>

This, monks, is called the power of moral shame.

(3) And what, monks, is the power of moral fear?

4 Here, monks, a noble disciple has moral fear. He morally fears bodily deeds, verbal deeds, mental deeds; he morally fears those attainments that are evil and unwholesome by nature.

This, monks, is called the power of moral fear.

(4) And what, monks, is the power of effort?

5 Here, monks, a noble disciple initiates effort. He dwells energetic in abandoning unwholesome states, in promoting wholesome states, steadfast, resolute in his effort and not shirking from the task of cultivating wholesome states. This, monks, is called the power of effort.

(5) And what, monks, is the power of wisdom?

6 Here, monks, a noble disciple is wise. He possesses wisdom regarding the arising and falling away (of things) that is noble and penetrative, and that leads to the complete destruction of suffering.

This, monks, is called the power of wisdom.

These, monks, are the five powers of the learner.

Therefore, monks, you should train yourself thus:

7 "I shall be accomplished in the power of faith.

I shall be accomplished in the power of moral shame.

I shall be accomplished in the power of moral fear.

I shall be accomplished in the power of effort.

I shall be accomplished in the power of wisdom."

This is how, monks, you should train yourself.

— evaṃ —

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<sup>11</sup> *Idha bhikkhave ariya,sāvako hirimā hoti, hiriyati kāya,duccaritena vacī,duccaritena mano,duccaritena, hiri-yati pāpakānaṃ akusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ samāpattiyā.* The underscored sentence can be alternately tr as "he is morally ashamed of an attainment that is evil and unskillful by nature."